



THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE IN SCIENCE AND THE QURAN: AN OVERVIEW

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Introduction

Knowledge is the most important wealth of humankind as without knowledge man cannot live as human being. The term Knowledge may be defined as (a) expertise, and skills acquired by someone through experience or education; theoretical or practical understanding of a subject; (b) what is known in a particular field or in total' facts and information; (c) awareness or familiarity obtained by experience of a fact or situation.¹ As per classical philosopher like Plato knowledge is "true belief with good reason'. In general sense Knowledge is awareness of Physical and Metaphysical objects.² The term knowledge is also used to mean the confident understanding of a particular subject with the ability to use it for a specific purpose.

In the present day world the scientific study and thinking has influenced the human society to such an extent that man accepts what science approves and discards what science disapproves. As such it cannot be denied that there is an unconscious demand of time for interpretation of religious doctrines and philosophy in the language of science. Attempts for this have been going on worldwide by different experts in their respective religious field. Therefore it is very relevant to discuss on the concept of knowledge in the Quran and also in Science. It is required to keep in mind that the Quran is not a book of Science and it was not sent to mankind to let the people know science. However, many scientific facts are expressed in extremely concise and profound manner which could be understood with the development of Science and Technology in twentieth century.

The Quran is a complete guide book having divine origin followed by more than one hundred fifty crores of peoples living in different corners of the globe and is said to provide complete code of human life (16:89). It is claimed by the believers as a Compilation of revelations received by Hazrat Muhammad (Pbuh), the great prophet of Islam (07:158) who is also many times called the World Prophet. The Quran proclaims:

We have sent not thee but as a (Messenger) to all mankind, giving them Glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men know not. (34:28)³



In other verse the Quran states:

We have explained in detail in this Qur'an , for the benefit of the mankind, every kind of similitude but man is, in most things, contentious. (18:54)⁴

It mentions many parables to let the people understand the truth through rational thinking and advices to invite people to the path of Allah with logical arguments having humanistic approach (16:125)

The Quran in its many revelations claims it to be a book of wisdom and has invited humankind to think over the revelations to realize the Greatness of the Creator of the universe. In comparison to the today's knowledge, there was nothing but ignorance in the desert of Arab peninsula before more than 1400 years ago. At that time there was no concept of scientific research and even there was nothing existed about any name of scientific field. As such the aim of the Quran was to draw attention of mankind to think over wisdom of Allah, the Creator of the universe and as such in more than seven hundred revelations the believers have been admonished to study the nature and to reflect on the mystery of the creation of the universe so that they may be able to use their best reason in realizing the supremacy of the Creator.⁵

SECTION –I

CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE IN SCIENCE

Science is the systematized knowledge derived from observation, study, and experiment carried out on a particular subject.⁶ In strict meaning Science is the systematized knowledge of nature and physical world acquired by means of observation and experimentation whereas in general meaning systematized knowledge of nature and physical world. The second meaning of science is widely used in present day world. The concept of knowledge in science is strictly confined to the areas which are confirmable by scientific means of observation and experimentation. Here in science no other factor such as assumption or belief is acceptable. Though reason and intellect are useful in scientific process but these are acceptable to the extent of scientific investigation only. In spite of the rigidness in the definition of Science, in the present day there is also trend in assimilation of different branches of knowledge which pave the way for redefining the meaning of science as 'any body knowledge organized in systematic manner'. Besides natural sciences today we have social sciences, library science, management studies etc also treated as sciences. Thus meaning of science may be taken in three levels of considerations. First one is strict meaning of science which is limited to the systematized knowledge of nature and physical world gathered by human effort through observation and experimentation. The second one is loose meaning of science which is the systematized knowledge of nature and physical world and the third one is very loose meaning of science which means systematized knowledge of any subject.



Hence taking the above meanings of science let us define what is scientific. It is obvious that anything relating to science or derived from science and even used in science may be referred to as scientific. Any theory or subject which is testable and confirmable with the methods of science is scientific e.g. scientific statement, scientific idea. Even the principles or methods used in science may called scientific e.g scientific research, scientific approach, scientific knowledge etc.⁷

Man has not created the natural laws. The concept of scientific knowledge is hidden in nature. So far man has been able to acquire a small portion of the knowledge of the natural laws leading to creation and establishment of the universe. The truths of the nature which can be known by man by virtue of his systematic effort or research are accepted as scientific knowledge. The process of acquiring scientific knowledge i.e. research may be defined as a scientific and systematic search for knowledge on a particular topic. It is the pursuit of truth with the help of study, observation, comparison and experiment. Here the knowledge is expressed in a language constructed by man himself and the main basis is reasoning, which is also accepted by the Quran as source of knowledge. However, the Scientific methods reject revelation as a source of knowledge for discovering truth. Science follows the techniques of observation, experiment and deduction etc. However, scientific knowledge has limitations, since it is the inference made mainly by sensual perception. As per five senses are highly fallible, the inference dawn using them cannot be given the status of infallibility. It is seen that scientific theory of one age is rejected in the later ages with the development of more reliable technique of experimentation or observation.

However, the development of scientific method for acquiring knowledge has notable contribution to enrich the domain of human knowledge. A method of inquiry to be scientific must be based on gathering observable, empirical and measurable evidence having specific principles of reasoning. The world famous scientist Newton believed that our solar system did not come in to existence automatically by laws of nature. Rather he thought that this grand design is the mercy of a Great Designer and our earth is an example of such a design.

SECTION -II

THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE QUR'AN

Muslims believe that God, the Creator of the universe revealed to the Hazrat Muhammad (Pbuh) guidance for the humankind for proper conduct in this world and salvation in the next world. These revelations are contained in the great scripture of Islam; the Qur'an .The concept of knowledge in Quran is based on the belief of one true God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. God is All-knowing; He knows the past, the present and the future without any gap. The God has revealed the knowledge through the holy prophet for the guidance of mankind and the revealed knowledge is compiled in to the Quran.



It is generally accepted that there are four faculties for acquiring knowledge and these are (a) sensual faculty: Which comprises of five senses viz. touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight, (b) Intellectual, (c) Intuitional (mystic experience), (d) Prophetic. The sensual experience plays a tremendous role in man's acquisition of knowledge.⁸ The Qur'an always encourages man to use more and more of his sensual experience in understanding the truth. It may be regarded as the obligation of the Muslims to observe and study the creation of the Almighty. In the Holy Quran the humankind has been asked a number of times to think, ponder and reflect over His creations, thereby to develop a scientific temperament and thinking to recognize His presence as the Creator of the Universe. The Quran encourages man to adopt inferential argument to enable him to accept the reality of truth of the existence of God.⁹ Thus, the knowledge received through Qur'an is prophetic one and the same may be comprehended by the human being though their experiences of other three faculties of acquiring of knowledge.

It is a fact that the Quran is not a book as per conventional meaning of the term book. Rather, it is a compilation of revelations received by the great prophet of Islam. Therefore, it is highly judicious to study the Quran in a holistic manner; otherwise there is every chance of misinterpretation of its revelations. The Quran itself seeks a holistic approach to its study and even it admonishes people who try to take its teaching discretely. The Quran proclaims:

...Then do you believe in part of the Scripture and reject the rest? Then what is the recompense of those who do so among you, except disgrace in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall be consigned to the most grievous torment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do. (02:85)¹⁰

Therefore, it is a serious matter if any one reads the Quran selectively and tries to find out the interpretation of any particular verse without going to take reference of other similar or revelations having admonition on the same matter. For example there revelations in the Quran which mentions about the boundless mercy of Allah whereas in other revelations the Quran speaks of strong punishment for injustice done and disbelief as well as disobedience of the admonition of Allah, the Lord of the universe.

The Quran being a compilation of revelations, the knowledge contained in is not put forward in systematized manner and hence even as per loose meaning of science it cannot be called science or scientific. However, though the Quran is revealed from Almighty God and it encourages people to have faith on the teaching and guidance of this great scripture without keeping any doubt in mind, it does not demand blind faith. Rather, in many revelations it has stated about the faith with reason which satisfies the people of understanding. The Quran encourages mankind through its various revelations to behold the nature and natural phenomena and ponder over to realize the greatness of His creation and believe on His existence and attributes. The Quran proclaims:



“Behold in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alteration of the Night and Day, there are signs for men of understanding” (03:190)¹¹

(Here is) is a Book which we have sent down unto thee, full of blessings, that they may mediate on its Signs, and that men of understanding may receive admonition. (38:29)¹²

Allah thought the man how to use pen (96:04) for development of knowledge which man did not know (96:05). In the Quran Allah, the Almighty time and again commands the people to see, to observe and use the senses to comprehend His attributes. The Islamic religious belief is based on reasoning and not based only on blind faith. The Quran has described the heavenly bodies as the creation of God and discouraged man to worship the same with blind faith. The Quran has the beautiful example from the great prophet Abraham who denied the Godship of the Moon and the Sun and accepted their creator as God. (06:77-79).The Quran also states that everything in the earth and heavens are created for the service of mankind and as such man are discouraged to worship the creation of God in blind faith. The Quran proclaims:

Among His Signs are the Night and the Day, and the Sun and the Moon. Prostrate not to the sun and the moon, but prostrate to Allah, Who created them, if it is Him ye wish to serve. (41:37)¹³

To acquire knowledge about His creation Allah advised mankind to travel through the earth and realize His attributes. The Quran states:

Say. “Travel through the earth and see how Allah did originate creation; so will Allah produces a later creation: for Allah has power over all things. (29:20).¹⁴

According to Islam the knowledge is infinite as its originates from and ends in God, who is the absolute knower. The Quran states:

And if all the trees on earth were pens and the sea (were ink), with seven behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing) : for Allah is Exalted in power, full of Wisdom. (31:27)¹⁵

Therefore, the religion Islam stands on the knowledge and teaching received by the humankind through the great book Al-Qur’an. The term used to mean knowledge in the Quran is *‘ilm’* which has wider connotation than its synonym in English i.e knowledge and the person who has acquired *‘ilm’* is regarded as *‘alim’* means knowledgeable. The Quran has referred that one information or point of view will be treated as *ilm* only when it is drawn with the help of three faculties viz. hearing, seeing and feeling (by heart) . The Quran proclaims:

And pursue not that of which thou have no knowledge, for surely the hearing, the sight, and the heart all of those shall be questioned of. (17:36)¹⁶

Moreover, the Quran says: *“Say,It is He who has created you, and made for you*



*the faculties of hearing, seeing, and understanding: little thanks it is ye give (67:23)*¹⁷

Significantly this instruction of the Quran brings the concept of modern science quite close to *ilm* in terms of method and source of knowledge. Actually the term *ilm* in the Quran is a comprehensive term as it encompasses knowledge acquired through sensory organs, empirical observations and through sources beyond human senses.¹⁸

Ilm is given great importance in Islam. *Al-Alim* ie The All knowing is one of the 99 names reflecting the attributes of Allah. The Quran asserts that all knowledge come from God. Hazrat Muhammad (Pbuh) in his teachings encourages his followers to acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave. He also declared that the men of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets.

The knowledge of the Quran has some special characteristics. These are: (a) It has the root and relationship to God, (b) It cannot be accepted but truth c) It is holistic or integral in nature, (d) It assimilates practical aspects of human life with spirituality, (e) It is connected with ethics, (f) It has no limit to confine.¹⁹

Quranic source of knowledge is not only divine revelations but also empirical perceptions which the Quran frequently encourages. As such Islam encourages man to study the nature and natural phenomenon and gain knowledge to realize the attributes of God. As such knowledge according to the Quran may be defined as the piece of information that leads to a better understanding of the Will of God.²⁰ There are other sources of knowledge which are not bestowed directly to mankind but man should acquire the same through his own pursuit. However, such knowledge will also complement the knowledge revealed through the Quran. As such the Quran recognizes the two forms of knowledge; one revealed knowledge (revelations) from the Creator and other scientific knowledge acquired through observation, experience and experimentation. Over all things the knowledge which the Quran refers is the energy of realizing the existence of Almighty God which is mentioned as Light. (24:35) and the man is compared with a brilliant star and his/her heart as lamp which is lighted without any fire when knowledge of realizing Allah creates in it.

CONCLUSION

1. THE QURAN AND SCIENCE: TWO DIFFERENT PPROACH TOWARDS KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge revealed in the Quran and the knowledge acquired by man by dint of his scientific approach is not comparable to each other because of some distinct features of the two sources. The Quran having the Divine origin claims its infallibility and eternity of the knowledge it contains. The Quran is the eternal guidebook for the man living on the earth. The source of knowledge in the Quran is revelations from God, which source is nothing but metaphysical and as such not acceptable to science.



The Scientific knowledge is profane. It generally does not claim its infallibility and as a matter fact it is a continuous process of evolution. From history of science one can easily mention the examples of changes on scientific theories with the discovery of new ideas. Scientific knowledge is basically depended on the sensual perception. Since human senses have limitations and are also fallible, the knowledge acquired through the same cannot be taken as infallible.

The Quran contains knowledge which is both confirmable and non-confirmable. There is an indication in the Quran regarding development of human embryo in the mother's womb (23:12-14) which is confirmed by scientific observation. But there are other thing such as creation Jinn from fire etc which is no way confirmable by scientific means of investigation.

In the Quranic perspective, no knowledge is rational where existence of God and His oneness is denied, whereas according to Science knowledge becomes irrational when it is dependent on any source like blind faith which is said be revealed truth.

1.1. THE QURANIC CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE IS EXHAUSTIVE:

Certain aspects of philosophy where human being had been in dark or in doubt such as Concept of God, fate of life, ethical values etc which are more or less irrelevant to science are given due importance in the Quranic concept of knowledge. The Quran has guided the mankind in giving a well defined concept of God, the fate of life after death and the foundation of humanistic relationship between man and man. These are some areas where man is unable to explore for a definite conclusion; the Quran has given him ideas through the revelations of God. These are the metaphysical concepts of knowledge available in the Quran where observation, experimentation and inference do not work for building a scientifically established fact. (The Quran and the Future of Science, page 150-51)

As such the Quran provides us multi dimensional knowledge and even comprehensive in its approach. This is an exceptional character of the Quran in comparison to other revealed books of knowledge.

2. THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE QURAN AND SCIENCE IS IN JUXTAPOSITION

The knowledge in the Quran and Science primarily has two different origins. The knowledge of Quran has been revealed to man from an external source which is invariably metaphysical and as such not acceptable to science. Whereas Science is the systematic knowledge of the physical world as well as nature, gathered by man through sincere observation and experimentation. Of course Quran accepts observation and reasoning as source of knowledge to comprehend the existence of the Creator and His Creation of the universe. Thus, it may be inferred that the two sources of knowledge can be treated having juxtaposition.²¹



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